مَعْنى الطاغوت

The meaning of “Taghut”

By Muhammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab

ابوذر

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In this short treatise, Shaykh al-Islam Muhammad Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab (rahimahullah) explains an extremely important issue: what is a taghut, how to identify a taghut, and what are the heads of the tawaghit (pl. of taghut). If you intend to learn your religion, may Allah aid you, then this topic is of the utmost importance - as it directly relates to "La ilaha ila Allah".

"There is no god worthy of worship except Allah" is a statement which includes both an affirmation and a negation, which is refferred to as al-kufr bit-taghut (disbelief in taghut), and al-imanu billah (and belief in Allah). Therefore, if you want to fully understand the meaning of La ilaha ila Allah - so you can actualize it and practice it - then you must study the meaning of "taghut".

We ask Allah to make this of benefit.

[note]: There is no English equivalent for the word "taghut" (الطاغوت), which linguistically means "transgressing all limits", and carries several meanings depending on it's context. Taghut could mean a physical Idol (like a statue), a living person like a Rabbi or a politician, or an ideology. For this reason, we've decided to not translate the word and leave it as "taghut", and Allah knows best.

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بسم اللّه الرحمن الرحيم

اعلم رحمك اللّه تعالى أن أول ما فرض اللّه على ابن آدم الكفر بالطاغوت والإيمان باللّه، والدليل قوله تعالى: ﴿وَلَقَدْ بَعَثْنَا فِي كُلِّ أُمَّةٍ رَسُولاً أَنِ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ وَاجْتَنِبُوا الطَّاغُوتَ﴾

Know - May Allah have mercy on you - that the first thing Allah made obligatory on the children of Adam is “al-Kufr bit-Taghut wal-imanu billah”, disbelief in the taghut and belief in Allah, and the evidence for this is His (ta’ala) statement: “**And sent to every nation a Messenger [proclaiming]: ‘Worship Allah and avoid the false god [at-taghut].**’” (16:36)

فأما صفة الكفر بالطاغوت فهو أن تعتقد بطلان عبادة غير اللّه، وتتركها وتبغضها، وتكفر أهلها، وتعاديهم.

As for the attribute of ‘disbelief in the taghut’, it is: to believe in the erroneousness of worshiping other than Allah, to flee from it, to hate it, to declare takfir upon it’s people, and to make them your enemies.

وأما معنى الإيمان باللّه فهو أن تعتقد أن اللّه هو الإله المعبود وحده دون من سواه، وتخلص جميع أنواع العبادة كلها للّه، وتنفيها عن كل معبود سواه، وتحب أهل الإخلاص وتواليهم، وتبغض أهل الشرك وتعاديهم.

And with regards to the meaning of “belief in Allah”, it is: to believe Allah is the only object of worship (ma’bud) - sharing no partner, it is to make all the different kinds of worship for Allah, it is to deny any other ma’bud, it is to love the people of ikhlas and taking them as allies, and it is to hate the people of shirk and to take them as enemies.

[note]: A “ma’bud” (mentioned above) is a person, place, or thing that people direct their worship towards, and it is commonly translated as “object of worship”. For instance, a cow would be considered a “ma’bud” in Hinduism, likewise Jesus (‘alayhis-salam) in Christianity. Muslims only have one ma’bud, and that is Allah تعالى

وهذه ملة إبراهيم التي سفه نفسه من رغب عنها، وهذه هي الأسوة التي أخبر اللّه بها في قوله: ﴿قَدْ كَانَتْ لَكُمْ أُسْوَةٌ حَسَنَةٌ فِي إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَالَّذِينَ مَعَهُ إِذْ قَالُوا لِقَوْمِهِمْ إِنَّا بُرَآءُ مِنْكُمْ وَمِمَّا تَعْبُدُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ كَفَرْنَا بِكُمْ وَبَدَا بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمُ الْعَدَاوَةُ وَالْبَغْضَاءُ أَبَداً حَتَّى تُؤْمِنُوا بِاللَّهِ وَحْدَهُ﴾

And this is the religion of Ibrahim - whoever turns away from it has made a fool out of himself, and it is the **example** that Allah informed us of in His saying: “**here has indeed been an excellent example for you in Ibrahim and those with him - when they said to their people: ‘Verily, we are free from you and whatever you worship besides Allah. We have rejected you and there has commenced between us and you, enmity and hatred forever, until you believe in Allah alone.**’” (4:60)

والطاغوت عام، فكل ما عُبد من دون اللّه، ورضي بالعبادة من معبود أو متبوع أو مطاع في غير طاعة اللّه ورسوله، فهو **طاغوت**.

And the word “taghut” is a general term. So, anything that is worshiped from other than Allah, whilst being pleased with this worship - whether it is something being worshiped, followed, or obeyed other than Allah and His Messenger, then it is a tahgut.

والطواغيت كثيرة ورؤوسهم خمسة:

The tawaghit are many, but their heads are five:

(الأول) : الشيطان الداعي إلى عبادة غير اللّه، والدليل قوله تعالى: ﴿أَلَمْ أَعْهَدْ إِلَيْكُمْ يَا بَنِي آدَمَ أَنْ لا تَعْبُدُوا الشَّيْطَانَ إِنَّهُ لَكُمْ عَدُوٌّ مُبِينٌ﴾

[**The First**]: Ash-Shaytan, who calls towards the worship of other than Allah, and the evidence is His (ta'ala) statement: "**Did I not enjoin upon you, O children of Adam, that you not worship Satan - [for] indeed, he is to you a clear enemy.**" (36:60)

(الثاني) : الحاكم الجائر المغير لأحكام اللّه تعالى، والدليل قوله تعالى: ﴿أَلَمْ تَرَ إِلَى الَّذِينَ يَزْعُمُونَ أَنَّهُمْ آمَنُوا بِمَا أُنْزِلَ إِلَيْكَ وَمَا أُنْزِلَ مِنْ قَبْلِكَ يُرِيدُونَ أَنْ يَتَحَاكَمُوا إِلَى الطَّاغُوتِ وَقَدْ أُمِرُوا أَنْ يَكْفُرُوا بِهِ وَيُرِيدُ الشَّيْطَانُ أَنْ يُضِلَّهُمْ ضَلالاً بَعِيداً﴾

[**The Second**]: The tyrannical ruler who changes the rulings of Allah, and the evidence is His (ta'ala) saying: "**Have you not seen those who claim to have believed in what was revealed to you, [O Muhammad], and what was revealed before you? They wish to refer legislation to the taghut, while they were commanded to reject it; and shaytan wishes to lead them far astray.**" (4:60)

(الثالث) : الذي يحكم بغير ما أنزل اللّه، والدليل قوله تعالى: ﴿وَمَنْ لَمْ يَحْكُمْ بِمَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ فَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْكَافِرُونَ﴾

[**The Third**]: He who rules with other than what Allah send down, and the evidence is His (ta'ala) statement: "**And whosoever rules with other than what Allah sent down, then they are the disbelievers.**" (5:44)

(الرابع) : الذي يدعي علم الغيب من دون اللّه، والدليل قوله تعالى: ﴿عَالِمُ الْغَيْبِ فَلا يُظْهِرُ عَلَى غَيْبِهِ أَحَداً * إِلَّا مَنِ ارْتَضَى مِنْ رَسُولٍ فَإِنَّهُ يَسْلُكُ مِنْ بَيْنِ يَدَيْهِ وَمِنْ خَلْفِهِ رَصَداً ﴾

[**The Fourth**]: Anyone besides Allah who claims to have knowledge of the unseen (al-ghayb), and the evidence is His (ta'ala) saying: **"[He is] Knower of the unseen, and He does not disclose His [knowledge of the] unseen to anyone. Except whom He has approved of messengers, and indeed, He sends before him [i.e., each messenger] and behind him observers**." (72:26-27)

وقال تعالى: ﴿وَعِنْدَهُ مَفَاتِحُ الْغَيْبِ لا يَعْلَمُهَا إِلاَّ هُوَ وَيَعْلَمُ مَا فِي الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ وَمَا تَسْقُطُ مِنْ وَرَقَةٍ إِلاَّ يَعْلَمُهَا وَلا حَبَّةٍ فِي ظُلُمَاتِ الأَرْضِ وَلا رَطْبٍ وَلا يَابِسٍ إِلاَّ فِي كِتَابٍ مُبِينٍ﴾

And, also His (ta'ala) statement: "**And with Him are the keys of the unseen; none knows them except Him. And He knows what is on the land and in the sea. Not a leaf falls but that He knows it. And no grain is there within the darkness of the earth and no moist or dry [thing] but that it is [written] in a clear record.**" (6:59)

(الخامس) : الذي يعبد من دون اللّه وهو راض بالعبادة، والدليل قوله تعالى: ﴿وَمَنْ يَقُلْ مِنْهُمْ إِنِّي إِلَهٌ مِنْ دُونِهِ فَذَلِكَ نَجْزِيهِ جَهَنَّمَ كَذَلِكَ نَجْزِي الظَّالِمِينَ﴾

[**The Fifth**]: Anyone one who is worshiped besides Allah whilst being PLEASED with that worship, and the evidence is His (ta'ala) statement: "**And whoever of them should say, 'Indeed, I am a god besides Him' - that one We would recompense with Hell. Thus do We recompense the wrongdoers.**" (21:29)

واعلم أن الإنسان ما يصير مؤمنا باللّه إلا بالكفر بالطاغوت، والدليل قوله تعالى: ﴿لَآ إِكۡرَاهَ فِي ٱلدِّينِۖ قَد تَّبَيَّنَ ٱلرُّشۡدُ مِنَ ٱلۡغَيِّۚ فَمَن يَكۡفُرۡ بِٱلطَّٰغُوتِ وَيُؤۡمِنۢ بِٱللَّهِ فَقَدِ ٱسۡتَمۡسَكَ بِٱلۡعُرۡوَةِ ٱلۡوُثۡقَىٰ لَا ٱنفِصَامَ لَهَاۗ وَٱللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ﴾

And know that a person will never become a believer in Allah, except through disbelieving in taghut. And the evidence for this is His (ta'ala) statement: "**There shall be no compulsion in [acceptance of] the religion. The right course has become distinct from the wrong. So whoever disbelieves in taghut and believes in Allah has grasped the most trustworthy handhold with no break in it. And Allah is Hearing and Knowing.**" (2:256)

الرشد دين محمد صلى اللّه عليه وسلم، والغي دين أبي جهل، والعروة الوثقى شهادة أن لا إله إلا اللّه، وهي متضمنة للنفي والإثبات؛ تنفي جميع أنواع العبادة عن غير اللّه تعالى، وتثبت جميع أنواع العبادة كلها لله وحده لا شريك له.

"ar-Rushd" (translated as: "the right course") is the religion of Muhammad, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, and "al-ghayy" (translated as: "the wrong") is the religion of Abu Jahl, and the most trustworthy handhold ("al-'urwat al-withqa") is the testimony that there is no god worthy of worship except Allah. And this testimony consisits of both negation and affirmation; negating all the different kinds of worship performed to other than Allah, and affirming all the different kinds of worship performed towards Allah alone without partner.

[end of treatise]

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